"Earthmom"

Anon

"Well, for instance, who is this All-Mother you're always talking about?"

"Why, you are, Edward...The All-Mother. You're the All-Mother, I'm the All-Mother, that little bird singing out there, it's the All-Mother. The All-Mother is everything. The All-Mother is life..."

The primal and supreme deity of the ancient world, the oldest and most universally worshipped, was the Great Mother, Mother Earth. Images of Her date back to Aurignacian Cro-Magnon peoples, from 27,000 years ago, and are found all over the Eurasian continent from Spain to Siberia. For thousands of years before there were any male gods, there was The Goddess, and Her worship continued unabated clear up until its violent suppression by Iron Age patrism. When and where worship of the Mother prevailed women and Nature were held in esteem. The Chinese called Her Kwan Yin; the Egyptians knew Her as Isis; the Navajo call Her Changing Woman. To the Greeks She was Gaia, and to many black peoples She is Yemanja. She is Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love, and She says: "All acts of love and pleasure are my rituals." She is also the ancient Crone Hecate, who gives us both wisdom and death. The Goddess is diversity. She represents both darkness and Light and Her worship is the reconciliation of opposites. There can be no such thing as a "Good Goddess" or an "Evil Goddess". Death is part of the natural cycle as night follows day and we accept it with grace as Her final gift. The search for Balance is the goal of Her people, and it is achieved by the acceptance of multiple paths and truths. Dion Fortune once commented that all goddesses are manifestations of the One Great Goddess whose identity is as the universal feminine spirit of Nature.

The eldest and greatest aspect of the Goddess is as Great Mother Nature, the all-encompassing energy of Universal Life. Her womb is the Quasar, the white hole through which all energy pours into creation, and Her all-devouring mouth is the Black hole itself through which all matter is consumed to be reborn once again as between Her thighs the universe is squeezed from spirit. Her energy then coalesces into Matter-Mater: the Mother of all forms. She ignites, becoming the Star Goddess Nuit, whose galactic breast is our Milky way. Of Her are born star systems and planets including, of course, our very own Earth Mother, Gaia.

Because of the diversity of the Goddess, She is seen as manifesting in many different aspects. She is often called The Triple Goddess, which refers to Her link in the fertility cycle where She appears as Maiden, Mother and Crone. Some ancient cultures personified this Triplicity as the waxing, full, and waning Moon, and other three-faced Goddess aspects are familiar to us as the Fates, the Graces, the Furies, the Muses, or even as Faith, Hope and

Charity. Another familiar division of Her aspects is into Mother and Daughter (Demeter and Persephone), or as Sisters/Lovers (Fauna and Flora). Such polarities are also important in Her worship. Sometimes the polarity can exist with two different aspects of the Goddess representing both poles, but more commonly it is the great gender polarity, for the Goddess is a deity of sexual loving.

She is Ishtar or Aphrodite, the eternal Lover who awaits with eager arms the mortal man brave enough to risk Her immortal favor. Many men have worshipped Her as a lover, but she may never be possessed, for She belongs only to Herself. She is Parthenos, the eternal Virgin (in the pre-patriarchial meaning "of her own household"). She represents the Strong Woman : not dominant, but independent. Her lovers are not truly human but divine. She has been the Beloved of many gods, and though jealous male gods eventually suppressed Her worship, She shared the co-rulership of Heaven and Earth for thousands of years of marital bliss. She is the inescapable Yin necessary for the cosmic balance of Yang/Yin. Symbols associated with Her (the Tree of Life, the Sacred Serpent, the Labyrinth) are found in all parts of the globe, at the heart of all the Mysteries, and underlying all the later accretions of successive religions. The search for Her is the search for our deepest ancestral roots. I am the star that rises from the twilight sea. I bring men dreams to rule their destiny. I am the eternal Woman; I am She! The tides of all souls belong to me-Touch of my hand confers polarity-These are the moontides, these belong to me.

Honor Thy Mother

In all the cultures where She is still worshipped, there is no confusion over Her identity : She is Nature, and She is the Earth. She is not an atavistic abstraction, not a mystical metaphor, not a construct of consciousness. Her body is of substance as material as our own, and we tread upon Her breast and are formed of Her flesh. "Walk lightly on the bosom of the Earth Mother," says Sun Bear, and traditional Native Americans agree. Cherokee shaman Rolling Thunder emphasizes that "It's very important for people to realize this: the Earth is a living organism, the body of a higher individual who has a will and wants to be well, who is at times less healthy or more healthy, physically and mentally." Frank Waters, author of Masked Gods and Book of the Hopi, makes the same point...To Indians the Earth is not inanimate. It is a living entity, the mother of all life, our Mother Earth. All Her children, everything in nature, is alive: the living stone, the great breathing mountains, trees and plants, as well as birds and animals and man. All are united in one harmonious whole.4 Renowned historian Arnold Toynbee, writing on "The Religious Background of the Present Environmental Crisis," also observed that: For pre-monotheistic man, nature was not just a treasure-trove of "natural resources". Nature was, for him, a goddess, "Mother Earth," and the vegetation that sprang from the Earth, the animals that roamed, like man himself, over the Earth's surface, and the minerals hiding in the Earth's bowels, all partook of Nature's divinity.5 Before ever land was, before ever the sea, Or soft hair of the grass, or fair limbs of the tree, Or flesh- colored fruit of my branches, I was : And thy soul was in me.

The Gaia Thesis

In order to understand the nature of the Earth Mother, we must first understand our own origins. Biologically, unisexual organisms are always considered to be female, since only the female brings forth life from her own body; in the act of reproduction single cells are referred to as mothers and their offspring as daughters. Each of us began our individual life as a single fertilized cell, or zygote. In the process of its innumerable divisions and multiplications, that cell kept dividing up and redistributing the very same protoplasm. That protoplasm which now courses through all of the several trillion cells of your adult body is the very same substance which once coursed through the body of that original zygote. For when a cell reproduces, the mother cell does not remain intact, but actually becomes the two new daughter cells. And this is why, no matter how many times a cell fissions in the process of embryological development, all the daughter cells collectively continue to comprise but one single organism. We may imagine that, should our cells have consciousness akin to our own, they may very well fancy themselves to be independent entities living and dying in a world that to them would seem to be merely an inanimate environment. Blood cells race along our arterial highways, but we know them to be in fact minute components of the far vaster living beings that we ourselves are. Over three billion years ago, life on Earth began, as do we all, with a single living cell containing a replicating molecule of DNA. From that point on, that original cell, the first to develop the awesome capacity for

reproduction, divided and re-divided and subdivided its protoplasm into the myriad of plants and animals, including ourselves, which now inhabit this third planet from the Sun. But no matter how many times a cell fissions in the process of embryological development, all the daughter cells collectively continue to comprise but one single organism. All life on Earth comprises the body of a single vast living being: Mother Earth Herself. The Moon is Her radiant heart, and in the tides beats the pulse of Her blood. The protoplasm which coursed through the body of that first primeval ancestral cell is the very protoplasm which now courses through every cell of every living organism, plant or animal, of our planet. And as in our own bodies, Earthly life was biologically female for the first 3 billion years, before sexual reproduction, complete with males, evolved around 600 million years ago. In evolutionary theory we say "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" (the development of the individual repeats the development of the ancestry); ancient people anticipated such scientific ideas when they intuitively conceptualized our planetary Divinity, like that first single cell, as feminine: our Mother Earth. The soul of our planetary biosphere is She whom we call Goddess. First life on my sources first drifted and swam. Out of me are the forces which save it or damn.

Out of me man and woman, and wild-beast and bird. Before God was, I am.6"...Be the terror and the dread of all the wild beasts and all the birds of heaven, of everything that crawls on the ground and all the fish of the sea: they are handed over to you." (Gen. 9:2-3)

Since the time of the Exodus, 3,500 years ago, Western Civilization has been pursuing a course that has taken it farther and three great monotheistic religions of the West, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have from their beginning activity suppressed the worship of the Goddess, and have tortured and brutally murdered millions of Her people. Today, she is all but forgotten in the hearts of Her children, and Her body lies raped and ravished in the wake of human progress. The Goddess is the concept of feminine divinity incarnate. The denial of feminine divinity results in the oppression of all women, including Mother Nature. As Toybee says: The thesis of the present essay is that some of the major maladies of the present-day world: for instance the recklessly extravagant consumption of nature's irreplaceable treasures, and the pollution of those of them that man has not already devoured: can be traced back in the last analysis to a religious cause, and that this cause is the rise of monotheism. 5

This is not to say that all non-monotheistic religions have a perfect track record for the treatment of women in those societies. Certainly Hindu cultures revere various goddesses and yet are among the more sexist and female-suppressive societies in the modern world. Nevertheless, there is abundant archeological evidence to indicate that things were not always as they are now, especially in truly ancient societies like India. Before the Aryan Indo-European invasion around 1,500 BCE many Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures, including the Harrapan culture of the Indus Valley and the Minoan people of Crete, had societies that appeared remarkably egalitarian. These societies were universally characterized by the worship of a powerful Great Mother whom the Hindu people still call Maha Devi Ma. She was later broken into a multiplicity of minor goddesses which were demoted to the position of wives or concubines of the gods. By the time sacred writings were codified in the Vedas, the Primal Goddess Maha Devi in India had been divided into a triplicity of goddesses characterized as Creator, Preserver and Destroyer: Saraswati, Laksmi and Kali; respectively the consorts of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. In Greece, a similar process led to Kore, Demeter and Persephone (or Hecate) created from the original Cretan Rhea. Once the Great Mother had been married off She became easier to control and the way was paved for Her dowry of natural wealth to be handed over to the financial control of Her divine consorts. Whether this new mythical development was a simple mirror of the social diminishment of women's rights or whether it preceded it and was invoked as a justification is really a moot point. But the land, formerly tied to matrilineal territorial clans, passed into the hands of patriarchal kings and princes who began to treat it as their private property and to lay waste to the forests in order to build vast temples and palaces to house their harems and other slaves. The Goddess of Nature went from the position of being the body and soul of all that lives to that of a wife, mother and household servant. Many traditions have given lip service to the so-called "Female Principle," either in the form of a divided identity like the Hindu Shakti or as a semi-divine emanation. But the power of the Goddess of Nature has gradually lost its ability to inspire the necessary respect and reverence once accorded to the Source and Bearer of Life.

Where are You, then, Mother, whose strength was before All other powers? Your name is the only freedom.8 Pantheism is the view that everything in Nature is alive, and that all living is Divine. In that context, then, the simplest explanation of Divinity is as "an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, it penetrates us, it binds the galaxy together." (Star Wars: "The Force")

Thus a pantheistic theology of Immanent Divinity ("Thou Art God/dess") contrasts sharply with the theology of Transcendent Divinity ("God is Out There") presented by most of "The World's Great Religions." Unlike the God worshipped by Christians, Moslems and Jews, the Goddess is not an all-powerful, indestructible, non-physical being who created the world and exists apart from it. Though Mother Nature is Life on the universal scale, Gaia, the Earth Mother is the very soul of this living planet, and she lives or dies as all life on this planet lives or dies...Mother, not maker; born, and not made. Though her children forsake her, allured or afraid, Praying prayers to the God of their fashion, She stirs not for all who have prayed. O my children, too dutiful towards Gods not of me, Was not I enough beautiful? Was it hard to be free? For, behold, I am with you, am in you, and of you: Look forth now and see!6 "Earth Mother, Your Children Are Here!" Current environmental crises are legion. Chlorofluorocarbon chemicals are destroying the ozone layer in the atmosphere; industrial pollution is creating the greenhouse effect which will melt the polar icecaps, drowning the coastal regions; and the destruction of the rainforests and the pollution of phytoplankton in the seas is causing worldwide droughts. The problems are so vast and the politics of greed and corruption are so complex that it will truly take a miracle to reverse such global destruction. The only thing that can save us is a total and electrifying change of consciousness. Nothing short of a worldwide realization of our planetary awareness will bring home the desperation of our plight. We must activate our Gaian identification so that we regain our shattered empathy with the Spirit of Nature. We must become one with the Earth Mother in order to feel Her pain/our pain and make it stop before the cancer we have become reaches the terminal phase.

The word religion derives from the Latin re-ligio; "relinking." The very purpose of true religion, then, is to heal the rifts and alienations which have caused us to become separated from the divine Source of Being: the rifts between humanity and Nature; between matter and spirit; between mind and body; between man and woman; between our own egos and the Soul of Nature. Recent books analyzing the trends of our wayward world have, with increasing frequency, been calling for a return to the worship of the Mother. So many wistful comments made by writers such as Merlin Stone, Mary Daly, James Lovelock, Judy Chicago, Dolores LaChapelle, Rene Dubos, Daniela Gioseffi, Paolo Soleri, Elizabeth Gould Davis, Arnold Toynbee, Joseph Campbell, Marija Gimbutas and Riane Eisler reflect a craving for such a religious revival. The truth is that such a revival has been going on for some time now: since the early 1960's:in the form of what we call the Neo-Pagan movement (from Latin paganus: "peasant" or country dweller: Paganism now refers to all nature religions). To the several hundred thousand Neo-Pagans who have been actively practicing and publishing for more than a quarter of a century, the greatest mystery of this religion is its continuing obscurity and invisibility to those such as the above-named writers, who continue to publish books advocating such a movement as this, while remaining ignorant that it is already in effect. The new Paganism encompasses many Nature-oriented groups such as Feraferia, Church of All Worlds, Madrakara, Bear Tribe, Venusian Church, Pagan Way, Church of the Eternal Source, Odinic Fellowship, Reformed Druids, Earth Church of Amargi and Children of the Earth Mother. The largest contingent of modern Goddess-worshippers, however, is found in Witchcraft, or Wicca. Wicca is a pre-Christian European Pagan magical tradition; European Shamanism. The violent suppression to the point of eradication of the followers of Wicca by the Inquisition can only be compared to the Jewish Holocaust of Nazi Germany (estimates of the number of martyrs run as high as nine million!), but today the Craft is making a powerful comeback on the wings of the re-emergent Goddess.

The Neo-Pagan movement, and especially Feminist Witchcraft, has recently been joined by increasing numbers from the Women's Spirituality movement and lately also by many thinkers from the Deep Ecology movement and even such radical environmental activists as Earth First!. These are some of the forces which form the core of the movement to restore the Earth Goddess to Her rightful place; a movement which has its roots in the combined studies of feminism and ecology and is the logical spiritual application of such studies. If Witches can be priestesses of feminism, then Neo-Pagans are the chaplains of the ecology movement. The overall movement,

though variously called Eco-feminism and Ecosophy, is truly an attempt at expressing Gaian Spirituality. These three streams of spirituality: Deep Ecology, Goddess Spirituality, and Neo-Paganism: have met and mingled with Native American, Hindu, Tibetan, Hawaiian and other ancient spiritual teachings and fused somewhat with the more nebulous New Age Movement. What is struggling to be born from this blending of pathways is a truly planetary religious metaphor that will transcend all the tradition-specific patterns in the same way the idea of Neo-Paganism absorbed and united a multiplicity of wildly differing but basically polytheistic religious groups in the 1970's. Perhaps what we are looking for could be called Gaean religion, because at the heart of our Unity is our identity as children of the same Mother: Gaia Herself; Mother Earth. It is said that it's a wise child who knows its own Mother! A brief digression on etymology here: Who is Gaia, that we would name a movement after Her? The name Gaia is the Greek name for the Earth Mother Goddess, She who was created by Light and by Love from the primal cosmic chaos. Pierced by the arrows of Eros, Gaia gave birth to all the plants, animals, gods and goddesses and of course the human race. So Gaia is the Mother of us all according to ancient Greek mythology.

From the moment that the people of Earth achieved the ability to observe the image of our planet spinning in all Her radiant blue-and- white splendor through the black velvet night, we have been impelled towards planetary identification. We must inevitably begin to think of ourselves as one planet, one people, one organism. The power of that image alone unites us, not to mention the concept that the past three-and-a-half billion years of terrestrial evolution resembles one vast embryogenesis. Something is developing, hatching, unfolding as a self-reflexive mind capable of contemplating its own existence. Gaia developed increasingly complex eyes and extensions of Her eyes/our eyes in order to contemplate Her own image. And now, having seen Herself through our satellite eyes, She is awakening to consciousness. She has a face, an identity and now even a name, and so we inevitably come to identify ourselves through Her as Gaian.

A Gaian movement would be deeply committed to communication and education. Many tribal people and many of the old nature-based folk religions such as native Australians, Hawaiians, Siberians, Tibetans and Americans have come to the brink of extinction rather than to allow the mysteries of their sacred rites to pass outside their tribes. Others have realized the need to become more eclectic if they are to survive.

The Gaian movement is presently small and largely unrecognized, since it is anarchic and not evangelical, but it has tremendous potential in having no single head and presenting a genuine answer to so many of the world's problems. Its vision is, in fact, an idea whose time has come. Yet there are still many obstacles, and revolutions in consciousness rarely happen overnight. The greatest forces operating against a new Gaian renaissance are inertia and apathy the watchwords of the '70s and '80s. But winds of change are blowing, and by the time the century turns we will see that once again Goddess is Alive and Magick is Afoot! And you who think to seek for me -Know that your seeking and yearning will avail you naught unless you know the Mystery: That if that which you seek you find not within you,You shall never find it without.For behold: I have been with you from the beginning, and I am that which is attained at the end of desire.9

1. Mack Reynolds, Of Godlike Power, 1966, pp. 146-1472.
2. Dion Fortune, "Charge of the Moon Goddess"
3. Doug Boyd, Rolling Thunder, 1974, p. 51
4. Frank Waters, "Lessons From the Indian Soul," Psychology Today, May 1973
5. Arnold Toynbee, "The Religious Background of the Present Environmental Crisis," International Journal of Environmental Studies, 1972, Vol. III
6. Algernon Charles Swinburne, "Hertha"
7. Tim Zell, "The Gods of Nature; The Nature of Gods," Gnostica #15, 1973
8. Ramprasad Sen, Grace and Mercy in Her Wild Hair; 18th Century Bengal
9. Doreen Valiente, "Charge of the Star Goddess"

(This article was first written in 1978; revised and updated in 1990.)

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